(b) The Government of India appointed Ambassador-at-Large (AAL) for Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs), with the aim to strategically promote better coordination within the NRI/PIO community as well as economic cooperation, investment and commerce by NRIs/PIOs with India and other countries.

(c) The mandate of Ambassador-at-Large for NRIs and PIOs is global and not limited to USA. Action taken and to be taken by his office, *inter-alia* include:—

(i) Visit to the countries with large diaspora presence to establish contact and network with various Indian organization.

(ii) Preparation of reports giving suggestions/proposals/ recommendations and organization of meeting and workshops covering youth and students, enhancement of India's image in the ethnic media, inter-religious meet, Indo-Caribbean leadership forum and youth and diaspora students etc. A number of workshops in these areas are in the offing.

(iii) Functioning of a Grievances and Complaints Cell which attends to more than 1000 queries per month from all over the globe pertaining to diaspora issues, seeking information and Consular complaints.

(iv) Managing a website which provides NRI/PIO related information and about the services provided by AAL's office.

(v) Organization of a Public Meeting for the Prime Minister with Indo-American community in September, 2003. More than 4000 participated in the meeting.

(vi) Promotion of Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD)-2003 and PBD-2004 for large scale diaspora participation.

(vii) Providing support and interaction base to visiting VIPs, Members of Parliament, State and Central Ministers with the NRI segment in socio-cultural, investment and other areas.

Denial of contracts to Indian firms

1022. SHRI NANA DESHMUKH: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Indian firms, though offering lowest

bids, are being denied contracts in Mauritius;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor;

(c) whether the issue was taken up during the recent visit of Mauritius delegation to India; and

(d) if so, the outcome thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) and (b) There have been press reports to this effect.

(c) and (d) The general issue of promoting trade and investment between the two countries, including expansion of oportunities for Indian companies, were taken up during the state visit of PM of Mauritius to India in November 2003. It was also agreed to explore the possibility of concluding a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement which would eventually lead to a Free Trade Agreement.

Recruitment of Nepalese by ISI

1023. SHRI V. NARAYANASAMY:
SHRI UDAY PRATAP SINGH:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of the fact that Pakistan's ISI is recruiting Nepalese Youth and made Nepal as well as Bhutan as its launching pad for anti-India activities; and

(b) if so, whether Government have taken up the matter with Nepal?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) and (b) The Government is concerned about ISI misusing the Nepalese territory and the open India-Nepal border for activities inimical to India's interest and is seized of the matter.The Government has noted the several instances of arrest of staffers of Pakistani Embassy in Kathmandu for being in possession of RDX and/or fake Indian currencies. Such officials have subsequently been asked to leave the country by Government of Nepal.

There is close cooperation between Nepal and India with regard to